



## Impact of liquor in tribal community- Boko, Assam

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### Abstract

*In the Tribal community most of the people are very much hooked to the Liquor or rice-beer. But the main problem is that the people do not realize the harmful effects of Liquor, they are attached to their traditional and cultural significance of Liquor. They also use Liquor in religious ceremonies and is offered to Gods and Goddesses. In most of the ceremonies and occasions, Liquor is served to the relative or villagers. They usually believe that rice-beer helps to reduce diseases and since most of the people were labors or hard workers they use to drink Liquor to get relief from the day's tiredness and pain of the body. In this study both primary and secondary data was used. The people of these societies generally get to know and taste Liquor from very teen age which sometimes turn them into alcoholic. Gradually they become highly addicted to Liquor and it often ruin their livelihood and family. Often these people start gambling to earn easy money and in the process some of these people get involved in antisocial activities and become astray. It is said that small intake of rice beer is good for health but regular intake leads to health problems. So, Liquor is intrinsically related to the socio-economic aspect of Tribal community. In Traditional societies, economic development is greatly influenced by cultural life. The magic-religious beliefs, festivals, and ceremonies, customs, taboos play a very important role in both innovation and adoption of occupations.*

**Keywords:** Tribal, community, rice-beer, liquor, traditional, health.

### Introduction

Liquor (rice-beer) and its impact on health and various diseases is a great public health challenge in the present society as well as in the tribal society, even though use of rice beer in tribal communities has been part of the cultural traditions. The definition of alcohol or liquor is diverge, for the government, liquor is the important source of income or tax revenue; for economists, it is just a product to sell and earn money; for a medical specialist, liquor is a major cause of death, accidents or injuries; and on the other hand for the common people, it is a product for pleasure and enjoyment. Mostly in the tribal communities rice beer is a common thing without which no socio-cultural functions can be performed. Rice beer always prepared at household level of the aboriginal communities of Assam and is served to all irrespective of age and sex.

Rice-beer is highly used in political issues, e.g. Panchayat Election. It is seen that during the Village Panchayat Election Campaigning, people used to drink liquor or alcohol and they also distribute the liquor to attract people or to entertain others. It is used after the election or before the election. Nowadays, we have seen that all the political parties of all societies get involved in the cycle of alcohol. So, we can say that this process/system is an impact of Globalization. The rice-beer has been a great importance in the tribal society besides its use in the social and cultural functions, it is also offered to the God and Goddesses as their beliefs.

The rice-beer is prepared in the traditional way and they usually believe that help to cure many diseases. They use liquor as social, political, and religious things. Many of the people were living below poverty line and they had to work hard to earn their livelihood so they drink liquor (rice-beer) as to get relief from the day's hard labor the tiredness and feel relaxed. The influence of culture on alcohol consumption have always been a field of interest<sup>1</sup>.

**Tribal Community:** Indian society is basically divided into tribal, rural and urban societies on the basis of the geographical encompassing and socio-cultural characteristics of the people. Tribal people mostly live in relative isolation having their own distinct culture, language and religion. In this contemporary world, they are considered as a socio-economically backward<sup>2</sup>.

In last few decades, alcohol has been categorised as a public health problem and there are relevant research evidences of harmful effects of drinking practices in the community and its relation with sexual violence, mental health, neurological dysfunction, association with communicable disease like HIV and tuberculosis<sup>3</sup>.

**The Impact of liquor on Socio-Economic Scenario:** The consequences of alcohol or liquor use are boundless. Alcohol not only a reason for various health problems in the society but also it is one of the important reason for the low socio-economic condition of the people<sup>4</sup>. In developing country like

India, use of alcohol can cause a number of social, economic, cultural, psychological and emotional problems affecting day-to-day life of the people in all over the society. For e.g. because of drinking alcohol death may occur and if the head of the family died that can cause various problems to the other family members specially children's. Also an alcoholic husband or the main earning member can deprive his wife and children from the much needed systems.

According to The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 1998) of the United Nations, increase in marginalization and alienation has led to widespread and excessive alcohol consumption among the tribal men in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. It has led to decline in men's income and forcible use of women's earnings. 'Resistance invites domestic violence and abuse'<sup>5</sup>.

**Causes of Social problems:** It affects the social structure and harms the social system of the males with their families. It often leads to: i. Quarrel amongst the family members and often abuse each other. ii. Most of the income is spent in the liquor. So, the children do not get to eat properly and it often leads to Malnutrition, iii. Due to this lack of money, Mothers could not send their child in the school. As a result this school dropout also occurs. iv. Thus, the children's were also hampered and they also adopted the unhealthy practices.

**Table-1:** State-wise alcohol consumption in North East India, per capita per week (in ml) as of 2011-12.

States of North East India	Toddy and Country Liquor	Beer, Imported Alcohol, Wine
Arunachal Pradesh	749	346
Assam	304	19
Manipur	155	6
Meghalaya	74	49
Mizoram	29	2
Nagaland	159	23
Sikkim	41	307
Tripura	163	2

Source – National Sample Survey Office (The Hindu news report). <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/blogs/blog-datadelve/article6344654.ece>

**Economic condition:** Economic upliftment of the communities is degrading day by day due to the use of liquor. The primitive social system is well preserved by the Rabha people, they select one person as their village as Village Headmen, whom they called 'Gaon-Burha' who is their chief of their village and takes up the responsibility to address their local problems. Each village has their own Gaon- Burha. It is also seen that when a

tribal people is found guilty or do any illicit work then he is punished by their village head (Gaon Burha) and they have to pay a penalty of pigs and rice-beer (Alcohol) and it is believed that by doing so the guilty person becomes free from the committed sin. The Tribal people have been preserving their social custom, beliefs and practices among them. Some of their beliefs and practices, festivals and ceremonies are also found amongst the Non-Rabha people who are their neighbors, and the impact of alcohol is also seen amongst all the Tribal communities, because in every ceremonies and customs they use liquor in high proportion.

**Literature Review:** Devi Mentioned about various institutions and functions of Bodos where each and every institution and function of Bodo, people use their traditional liquor, which starts from birth ceremony to marriage and death rituals where all the people were entertained with rice-beer (jau) abundantly<sup>6</sup>.

Choudhury studied about the most important items, indispensable in the puja, are areca nuts, betel leaves, maukhauna (bhetai in assamese, a kind of flower giving wild plants), rice, rice-beer, banana, pounded rice and pig. Where rice beer plays a very important role in the society<sup>7</sup>.

Brahma explained that the favorite beverage is a kind of rice-beer known as 'madh' or 'jau', prepared by steeping rice in water for two or three days. Another liquor, (photika) prepared from madh or jau by distillation, is of a less innocent character. It is perfectly colorless and has a strong pungent taste, redolent of smoke, and has something in common with very strong whiskey. This if taken in any quantity, acts on the brain very rapidly and injuriously. Brahma again says that rice-beer has a very great importance in tribal society. Besides the issue in social functions, it is also offered to the Bathou borai (the chief god) and other minor gods and goddesses. The 'jumai' or 'jau' is prepared with a traditional system<sup>8</sup>.

Murthy observed and has documented that from the very early days, social caste and class has strongly influenced by the consumption of alcohol. Consumption of liquor are known in ancient and also in the contemporary India. Many religions prohibited its use though, cultural contexts of alcohol use cannot be separable from socio-political contexts from the society<sup>9</sup>.

Chowdhury *et al.* has documented cultural contexts and impact of alcohol use. He made a quantitative study of use of alcohol in six villages of West Bengal, the result of which shows that drinking is an integral feature with locally brewed liquors as well as Indian Made Foreign liquor consumed by the village communities. Increase in alcohol use problems can be attributed to social changes related to development. This observation concludes that there might be limitations in settings of the western clinical models of dependence where socio-cultural conditions define locally acceptable and problem use of alcohol<sup>10</sup>.

**Objective of the Study:** i. To study the influence of liquor (rice beer) in tribal Communities of Boko.

**Methodology**

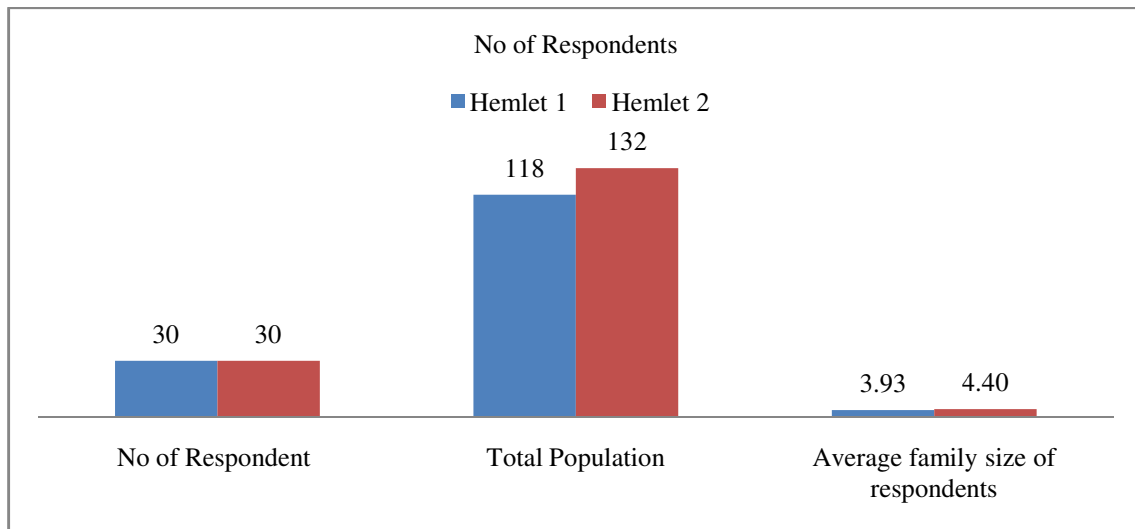
In the present study, Kamrup (R) district of Assam was purposively selected. The present study was mainly comprised from primary data. From the study area, two hamlets were taken randomly based on quantum of targeted population and also 30 samples (taking 15 males and 15 females) were taken from each hamlet by applying simple random sampling method. Thus a total of 60 samples were selected for the present study.

**Results and discussion**

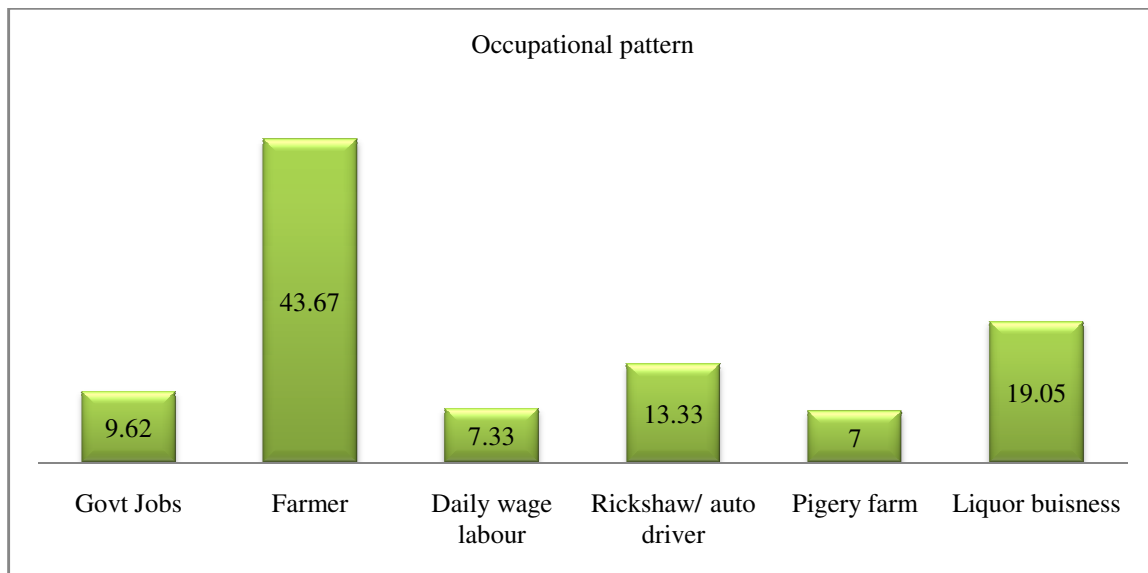
The related diagrams of the topic ‘Impact of Liquor in Tribal Community- Boko, Assam’ is as follows.

Figure-1 represents the no of respondents and population (hamlet wise) in the study area. Here the diagram shows that highest average family size 4.40 per cent was found to be higher in the second hamlet. For the study no of respondents was equal in both the villages.

Figure-2 indicates the occupations which are exist in the tribal community of Boko. Here the diagram shows that highest rate 43.67 percent of population was farmer and lowest 7 percent was earning their livelihood through piggery farming, but the significantly 2<sup>nd</sup> largest percentage rate 19.05 percent of population in the study area was found to be actively engaged in liquor business as their livelihood.



**Figure-1:** No of respondents in the study area and average family size of the respondents.



**Figure-2:** Occupational pattern of the targeted population in Boko.

Figure-3 shows the reason of consuming the liquor amongst tribal people, here majority of people mentioned that the lack of employment 38.33 percent and traditional behavior 31.67 percent is highly responsible for the heavy consumption of rice beer.

Figure-4 represent majority of people who lives in the study area were mentioned that they were consuming rice-beer daily which is 42.68 percent and lowest 11 percent respondents said twice a day. Through this table we found that most of the people they consume alcohol daily and it also depends on their mood.

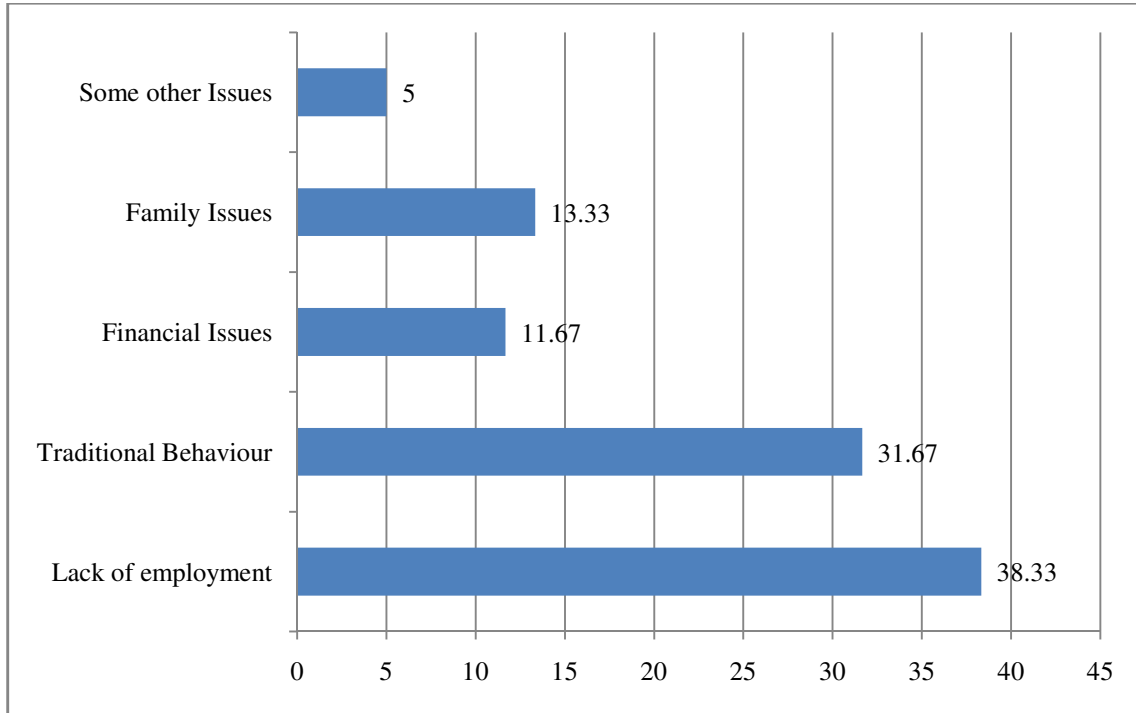


Figure-3: Reason of consumption liquor (per day).



Figure-4: Consumption of liquor (per week).

Figure-5 represent engagement of people who prepare liquor in their home was found to be higher as female population in the study area which was 98 per cent, whereas only 2 percent male population was found who engaged in preparation of liquor.

Figure-6 showed that 45 percent respondents prepare liquor (Rice-beer) in their home because of traditional attitude which was found to be higher in the study area and 5 percent respondents who prepare liquor because of demand made by their husband. Here 32 percent respondents also mentioned that they prepare liquor for commercial use.

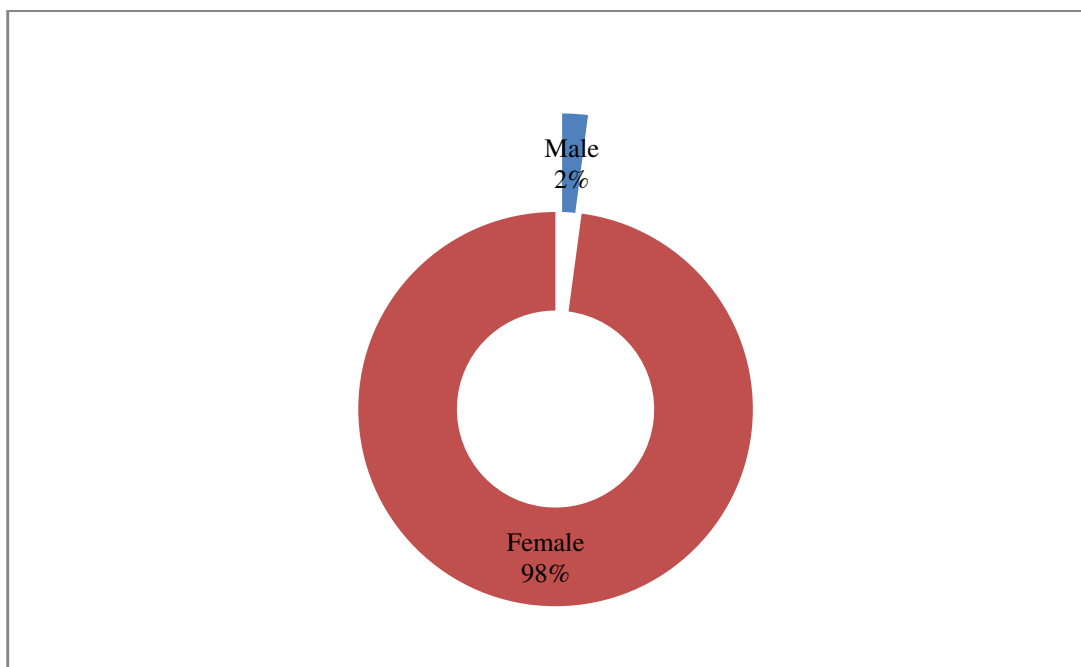


Figure-5: Total percentage of people engagement in preparation of liquor gender wise.

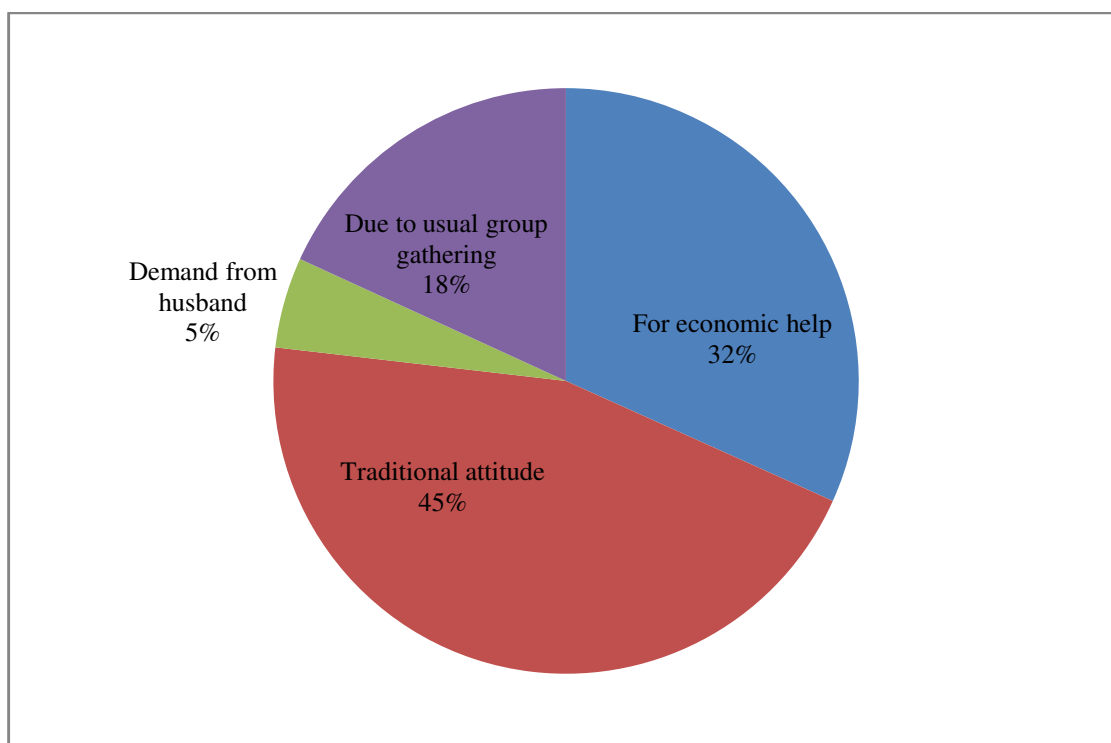


Figure-6: Purpose of making liquor in their home.

In the Figure-7, Bar diagram indicated the effects of alcohol consumption on family in the study area, where 71.67 per cent respondents mentioned that quarrel happens after consumption the alcohol, which is affecting the House Wives and Children.

In the Figure-8 uncivilized behavior of the children was found to be higher in the study area which was 53 per cent and 7.33 per cent was found to be School Drop-Outs.

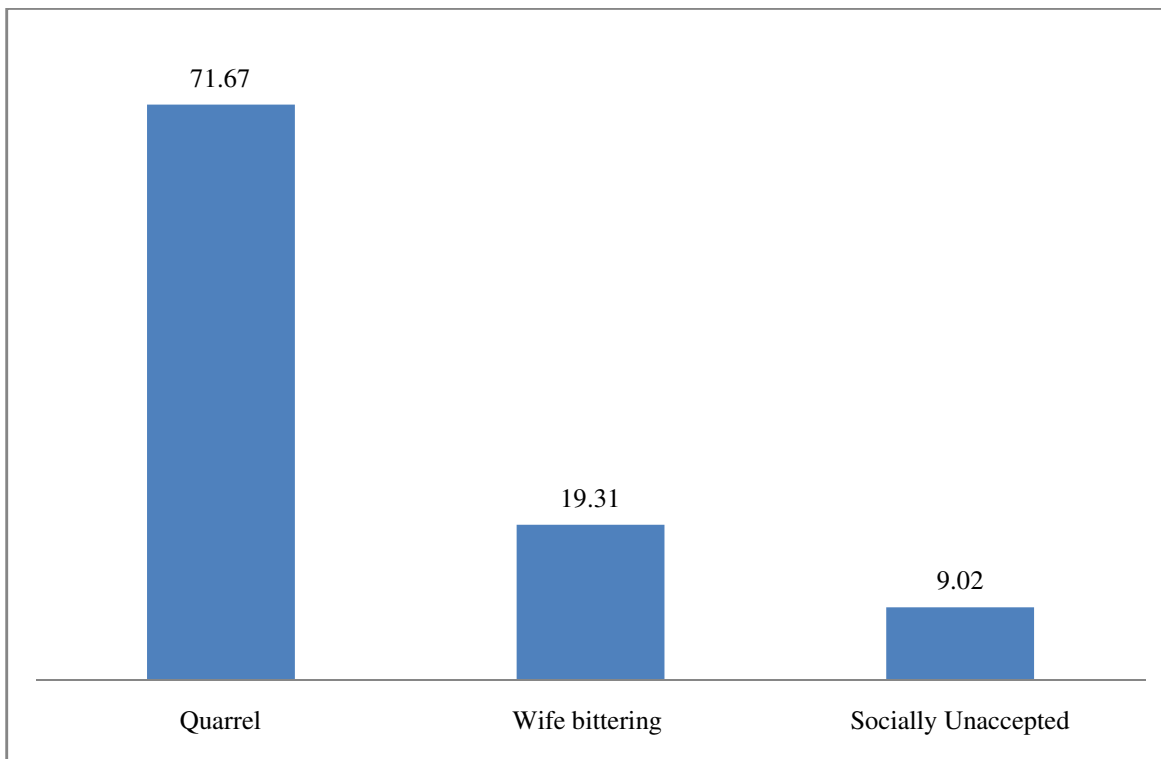


Figure-7: Use of alcohol consumption and its impact on family.

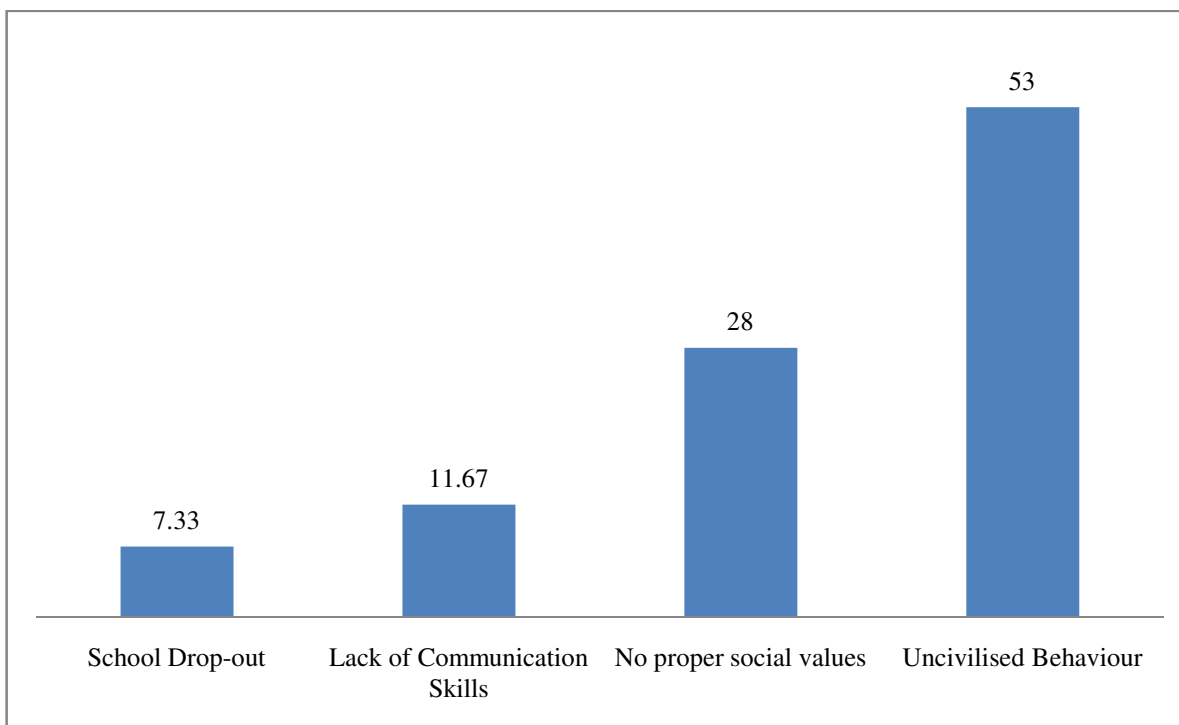
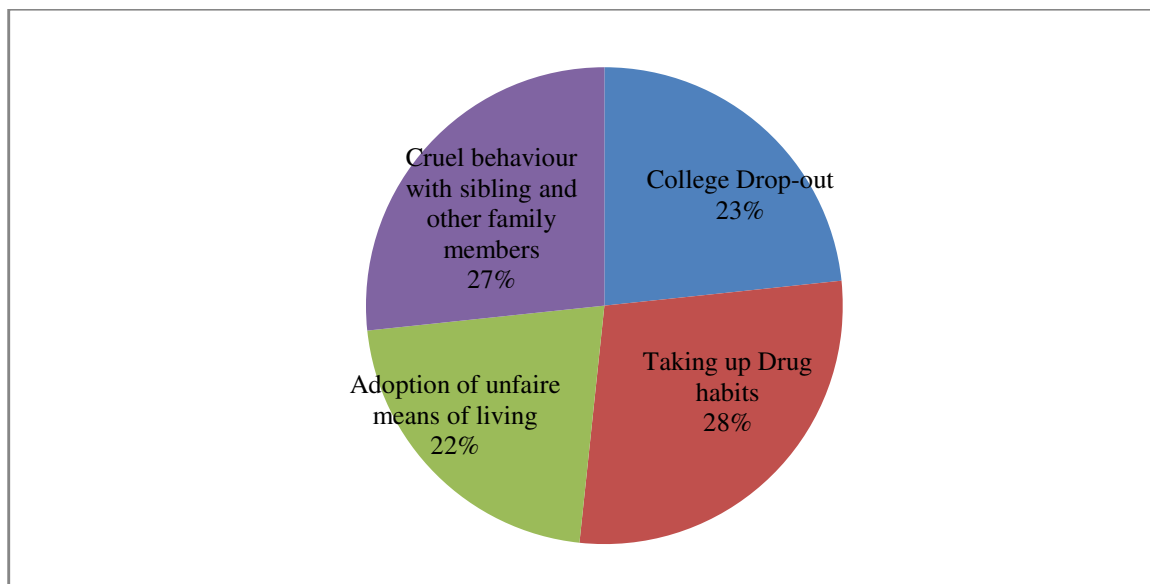


Figure-8: Use of liquor and its impact on children.



**Figure-9:** Use of liquor and its impact on Teenagers.

In the Figure-9 bar diagram shows the four categories which affects the Teenagers equally. Study shows 28 per cent are taking up drug habits among the teenagers. Accordingly adoption of unfair means of living was found 22 per cent.

### Conclusion

In North-East, the head of the family is the male person, and they are usually engaged in agricultural work or daily wage labors. They are economically not stronger like the other community or society. Even production of rice-beer is being their occupation; it is not limited in their traditions. In tribal communities people use to believe that practicing of making liquor in their home is not hampering their life, but in real these old faiths and beliefs hampering the families and children in most of the tribal communities.

Main purpose of making liquor in their home was found as their traditional attitude but most importantly only female members are to be found in the process of preparing the liquor, also the people of these societies generally get to know and taste liquor from very teen age which sometimes turn them into alcoholic. Gradually they become highly addicted to liquor and it often ruin their livelihood and family.

In the present scenario, due to impact of Globalization, Tribal people were found to be using the rice-beer improperly. Some of them are using this as a commodity of profit making business, these has rather broken the traditional customs of the local tribes.

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